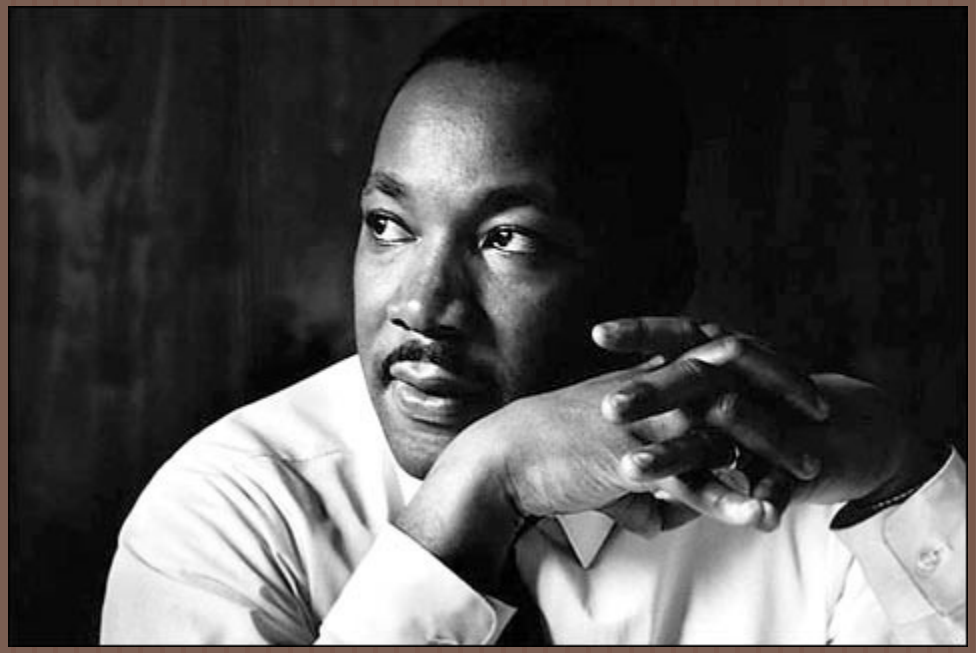
Remember! Celebrate! Act!
A Day On…Not A Day Off

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. HOLIDAY
JANUARY 21, 2013

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Martin Luther King Jr. was a fundamental force behind the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.



Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

The holiday celebrates his life and achievements and encourages people everywhere to reflect on the principles of nonviolent social change and racial equality.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

The racial crisis in Birmingham, Alabama, which at the time was described as the “most segregated city in America” was a critical turning point in the struggle for African American civil rights.

Civil rights crisis in Birmingham

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

In Birmingham between 1957 and 1962, seventeen Black churches and homes had been bombed, including the home of Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, who campaigned actively for civil rights.

Although the population of Birmingham was 40 percent African American, there seemed little hope for a political solution to the racial divide. Of 80,000 registered voters, only 10,000 were Black.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Shuttlesworth invited King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to protest conditions in Birmingham. The city was the wealthiest city in Alabama and a defender of segregation.

The Birmingham Campaign was a strategic effort to promote civil rights for African Americans.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

In March 1963, King, along with fellow SCLC leader Ralph Abernathy, set up headquarters in one of Birmingham's Black neighborhoods.

They began recruiting volunteers for rallies and gave workshops in nonviolent techniques.

King scheduled the protests to disrupt Easter

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Ralph Abernathy and Martin Luther King Jr. walking in Birmingham

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Bull Connor

The Birmingham city government was undergoing a major change. Voters had decided against a three-man city commission and instead to elect a mayor. This was done mostly to force Bull Connor, commissioner of public safety and the man largely responsible for the attack on the Freedom Riders, to step

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Connor ran for mayor, but the voters elected the more moderate Albert Boutwell. The city commission, however, refused to step down, leaving Birmingham with two city governments until the courts decided which was the legitimate one.

Albert Boutwell

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The campaign began on April 3, 1963 with lunch counter sit-ins.

On April 6th, police arrested 45 protesters marching from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to city hall. The next day, Palm Sunday, more people were arrested. In addition, two police dogs attacked 19-year-old protester Leroy Allen as a large crowd looked on.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Leroy Allen being attacked by police dogs

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While the jails filled, King negotiated with White businessmen, whose stores were losing business due to the protests.

Although some businessmen were willing to consider desegregating facilities and hiring African Americans, city officials held fast to segregationist policies.

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On April 10th, Judge W.A. Jenkins, Jr., issued an order preventing the city's civil rights leaders—including King, Abernathy, and Shuttlesworth— from organizing demonstrations. Unlike previous injunctions this was issued from a state court, not a federal one.

King felt comfortable violating the injunction, on the grounds of adhering to the federal laws with which it was at odds.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Persuading the other leaders of the campaign to violate the injunction, however, took some convincing, because many of the clergy felt bound to be in the pulpit–and not in jail–on the following Sunday, Easter. King succeeded in convincing them, and personally led a march on Good Friday, April 12th.

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After a few hours of debate, King told his staff, *“Look, I don't know what to do. I just know that something has got to change in Birmingham. I don't know whether I can raise money to get people out of jail. I do know that I can go into jail with them.”*

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Martin Luther King Jr. arrest photo (1963)

On Good Friday, April 12th, King and others involved in organizing the Birmingham campaign against segregation, were arrested for violating the injunction prohibiting public civil rights demonstrations.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Birmingham police separated King and Abernathy, placing each in solitary confinement, and denied each man his rightful phone calls to the outside world.

During his imprisonment, King composed a response to local White religious leaders' criticisms of the Birmingham Campaign that had been published in the *Birmingham News* that called him a troublemaker.

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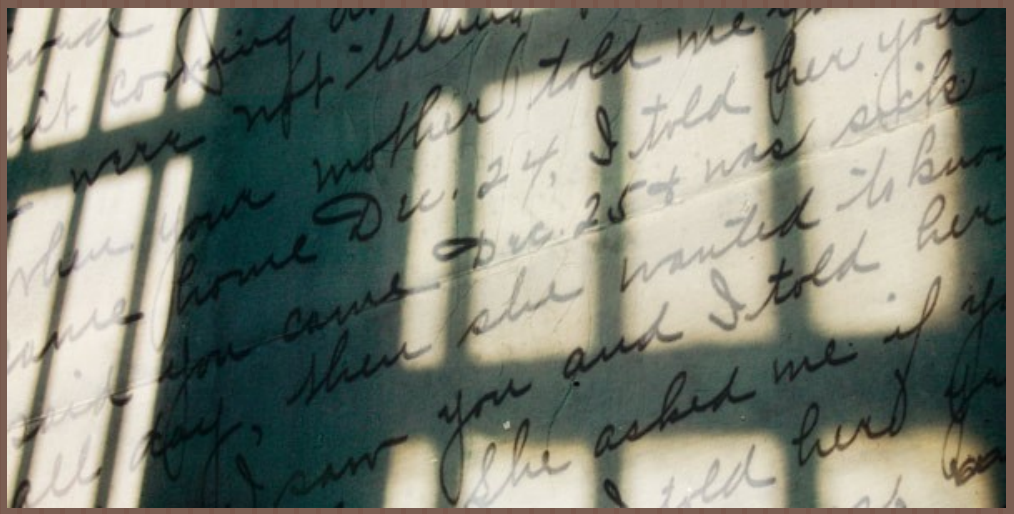
In his long, handwritten letter, King laid out the events that led to his arrest before launching into a discussion of the importance of improving equality in all regions and communities in America.



Courtesy of
The King Center

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Written in several pieces during the week, on toilet paper, newspaper, and with a smuggled pen, the letter was widely published.

The letter was compiled in full by King’s lawyers on April 16, 1962.

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Coretta Scott King, disturbed by the unprecedented silence from her husband, called the White House. Her call was returned by Robert Kennedy and then by President John F. Kennedy. The Kennedy Administration sent FBI agents to Birmingham, and King promptly received more hospitable treatment.

This intervention by Kennedy gave the movement greater momentum.

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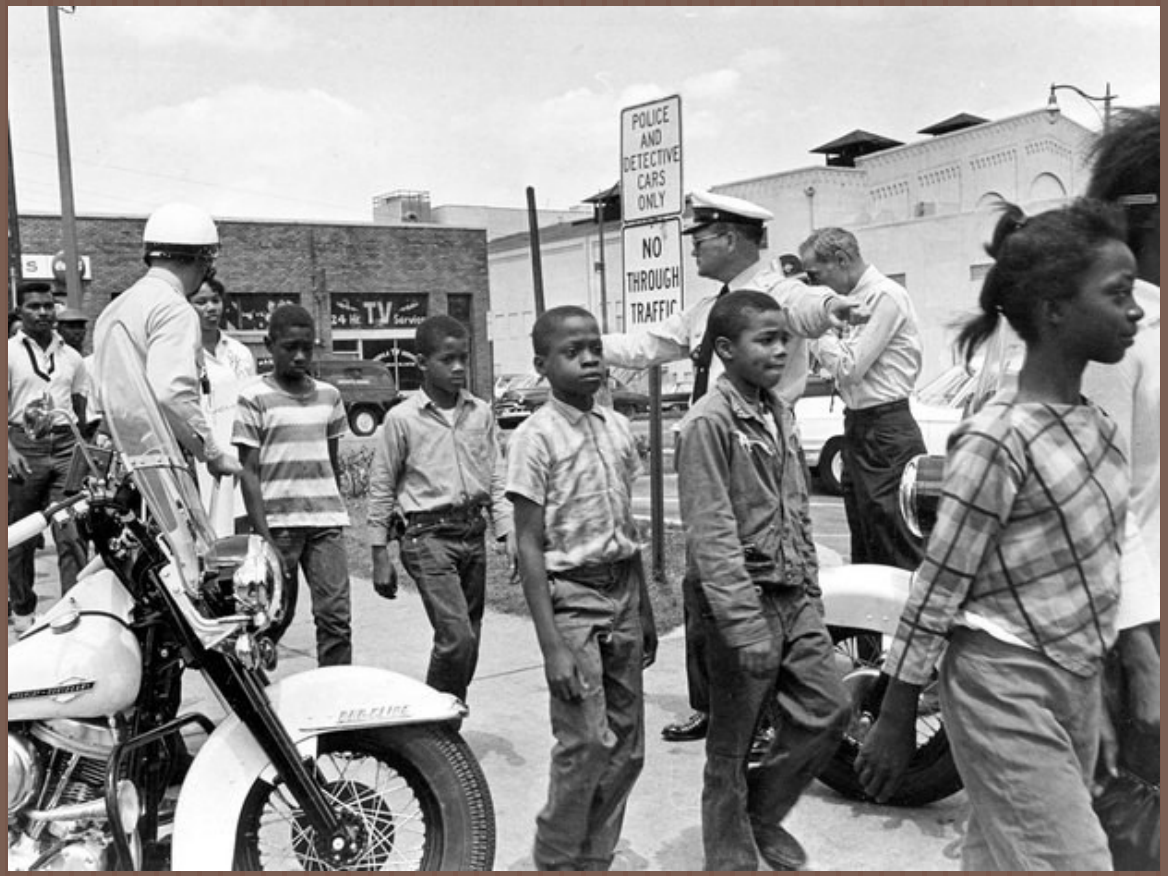
King was released from jail on April 20th. Meanwhile, SCLC organizers started to plan further demonstrations. At the suggestion of James Bevel, the organizers began to recruit younger protestors. They believed although potentially dangerous, children were the true beneficiaries of the movement and the hope for the future. The protests assumed a larger scale and more confrontational approach.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday



Protesting children being arrested in Birmingham 1963

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On May 2nd, children ranging in age from six to 18 gathered across the street from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. King spoke to the young people and afterwards led them downtown, singing “We Shall Overcome.”

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The next day, more young people arrived, and another march occurred. By this point, the situation had become overwhelming for Bull Conner, whose jails we

Arrested protestors looking out the back of the police vehicle

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On May 3rd,under Connor's command, young protestors were blasted with fire hoses, and attack dogs were released against them.

It was these acts of violence—broadcast on national television—that pricked the national conscience, and marked a turning point not only in Birmingham but also in the Civil Rights Movement as a whole.

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Birmingham Fire Department blasting Black Protestors with fire hoses

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Young Black protestors being loaded on school bus

The young protestors were arrested and placed in police vans. Soon the police began pushing the protesters in school buses because there were no more vans. Three hours later, there were 959 children in jail.

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Within several days, protests had become so massive and volatile that the city was willing to negotiate.

Desegregation of lunch counters and other facilities were scheduled. The city promised to confront the issue of inequality in hiring practices, to grant amnesty to arrested demonstrators, and to create a biracial committee for the reconciliation of differences.

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As had happened in Montgomery, violence followed the concessions. Whites bombed Black homes and churches, and Blacks retaliated with mob violence.

King's activities in Birmingham included a final stage, during which he patrolled the city, speaking wherever people had gathered. He implored African Americans to answer violence only with peace.

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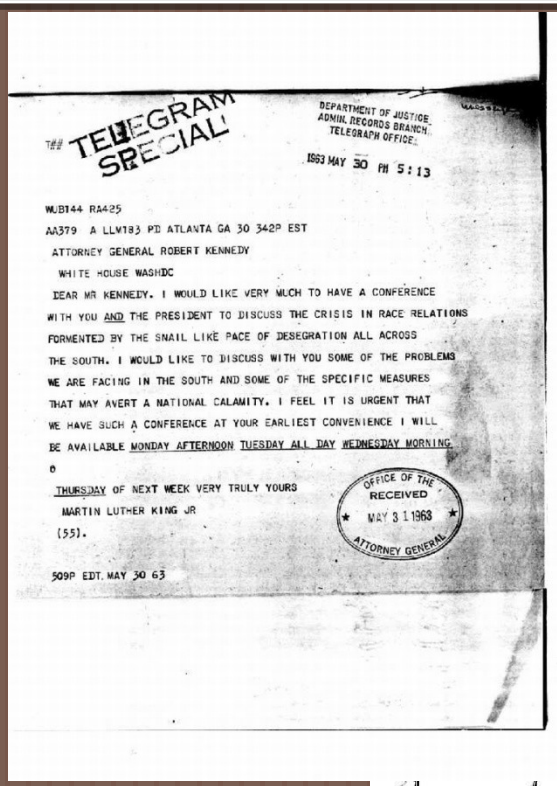
The subsequent brutality of the city's police, illustrated by television images of young Blacks being assaulted by dogs and water hoses, led to a national outrage resulting in a push for unprecedented civil rights legislation.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Correspondence flooded the White House conveying outrage, and it became clear that the Kennedy Administration would have to confront civil rights issues more directly.



TELEGRAM SPECIAL

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
ADMIN. RECORDS BRANCH
TELEGRAPH OFFICE

1963 MAY 30 PM 5:13

WUB144 RA425
AA379 A LLW183 PD ATLANTA GA 30 342P EST
ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT KENNEDY
WHITE HOUSE WASHDC
DEAR MR KENNEDY. I WOULD LIKE VERY MUCH TO HAVE A CONFERENCE WITH YOU AND THE PRESIDENT TO DISCUSS THE CRISIS IN RACE RELATIONS FORMENTED BY THE SNAIL LIKE PACE OF DESEGRATION ALL ACROSS THE SOUTH. I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH YOU SOME OF THE PROBLEMS WE ARE FACING IN THE SOUTH AND SOME OF THE SPECIFIC MEASURES THAT MAY AVERT A NATIONAL CALAMITY. I FEEL IT IS URGENT THAT WE HAVE SUCH A CONFERENCE AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE I WILL BE AVAILABLE MONDAY AFTERNOON TUESDAY ALL DAY WEDNESDAY MORNING
O
THURSDAY OF NEXT WEEK VERY TRULY YOURS
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR
(55).

OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
RECEIVED
MAY 31 1963

509P EDT MAY 30 63

GENERAL
HU2/ST 1

The White House
Washington

1963 MAY 3 PM 7 18

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RACIST POLICE STATE OF SOUTH AFRICA 16 CORE
ILED TODAY FOR WALKING ON PUBLIC HIGHWAYS AND
FITH ARREST HUNDREDS OF JUVENILES ARRESTED
IDAY TODAY BIRMINGHAM POLICE CLUBBED PEACEFUL
IE DOGS BIT 5 NEGROES PROTESTING SEGREGATION
UST ACT TO RESTORE FREEDOMS

OF PROTEST DISSENT SPEECH AND ASSEMBLY
JAMES FARMER NATIONAL DIRECTOR CORE.

Filed by Mr White's office

RECEIVED
SEP 13 1963
CENTRAL FILES

Cou

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

On June 11th, President Kennedy voiced his commitment to federal civil rights legislation. He had been holding off, preoccupied by the Cold War, but Birmingham had pressed the issue. Kennedy's commitment culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which was signed into law by Lyndon Johnson after Kennedy's assassination.

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The act mandated federally what had in Birmingham been won locally: a White commitment to desegregation and equal employment opportunities. It also gave the federal government power to enforce desegregation laws in schools by withholding federal funds from noncompliant school districts.

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While changes in local policies constituted the Birmingham campaign's immediate outcome, the effort's long-term effects were felt nationwide.

King's fame as a civil rights leader was redoubled.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Although King's letter was not published until after the Birmingham crisis was resolved, it is widely regarded as one of the most important written documents of the civil rights movement and a classic text on civil disobedience.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

The King holiday is celebrated at U.S. military installations, and is observed by local groups in more than 100 nations.

During his lifetime, Dr. King worked tirelessly toward a dream of equality. He believed in a nation of freedom and justice for all, and encouraged all citizens to live up to the purpose and potential of America.

Today we honor his dream.

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

“Never apologize for being correct. Many people, especially ignorant people, want to punish you for speaking the truth. For being correct. For being you. Never apologize for being correct, or for being years ahead of your time. If you're right and you know it, speak your mind. Speak your mind. Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is still the truth.”

Mohandas Gandhi

Works Cited

http://www.thekingcenter.org/
http://www.jfklibrary.org/
http://www.whitehouse.gov/
http://birmingham.org/
http://biography.com/people.martin-luther-king

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday

Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, Patrick Air Force Base, Florida January 2012

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